

Newsday

Life's Victories

SURVIVING BREAST CANCER

A community feature produced by the Newsday
Community Affairs department

TONI ANNE SUMMERS, of Lindenhurst, was a stickler when it came to getting her annual mammograms and breast ultrasounds along with performing monthly — and sometimes weekly — breast self-exams. But during the busy summer of 2015, the grandmother of two, then 61, was entertaining her visiting grandchildren and missed her breast cancer screening appointments.

By early September, she discovered a "sausage-sized" lump in her right breast. "When I felt it, I was horrified at how large it was and how quickly it had grown," said Toni Anne, an exercise enthusiast and a diehard "clean" eater.

A mammogram showed a suspicious large mass, and a follow-up MRI-guided biopsy revealed two additional tumors that were not visible in the initial screenings. "All three tumors were triple-negative breast cancer [a fast-growing aggressive form of the disease]," said the retired mathematician.

Doctors recommended eight months of chemotherapy during which time Toni Anne experienced several of its side effects, including neuropathy, numbness in her feet, nausea, and hand and foot syndrome which causes redness, swelling and blistering of the hands and feet.

Following chemotherapy, she underwent a mastectomy and had her right breast removed. During the surgery, doctors discovered that two of the three tumors had disappeared. However, the large tumor had only decreased in size, and tests show that the cancer had spread to several lymph nodes. After two more rounds of chemotherapy and six weeks of radiation, Toni Anne completed treatment in May 2017, some two years after her diagnosis.

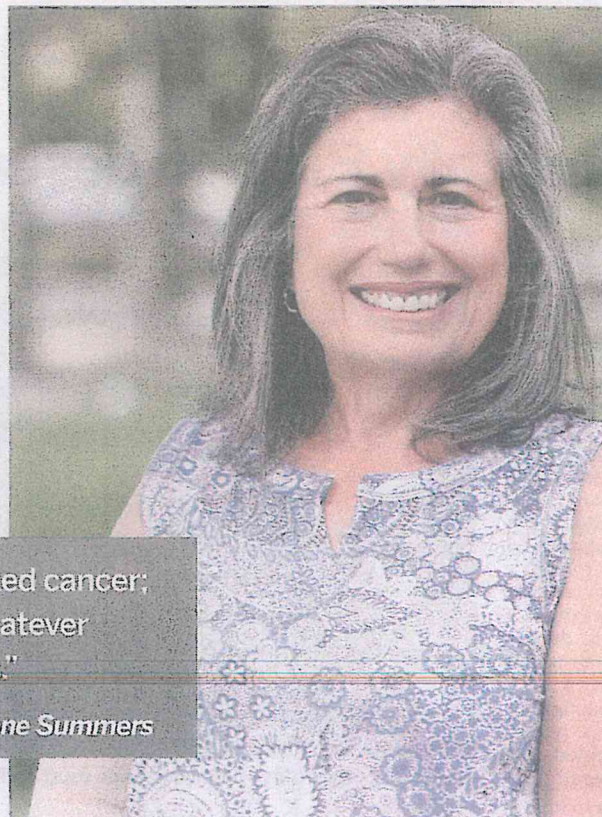
During her harrowing cancer journey, Toni Anne drew strength from her husband and family. "My husband believed I would live, even when I did not," she said. "My husband, family and friends were there for me. I never had to worry about finding a ride to treatment. My family came from as far away as Texas, California and Sweden to take me to treatment and support me. The Babylon Breast Cancer Coalition, she says, helped her "relax and heal."

In remission for seven years, Toni Anne says cancer has taught her to "savor each day and to look on tomorrow as a gift." "I live the life I have to its fullest, because I don't know what tomorrow might bring, but I also have to prepare for tomorrow because I may have many."

DID YOU KNOW:

Triple-negative breast cancer is a kind of breast cancer that does not have any of the receptors (i.e. estrogen, progesterone, HER2) that are commonly found in breast cancer.

Source: nationalbreastcancer.org



"While I hope I have kicked cancer,
I believe I can handle whatever
unfolds in my life travels."

— Toni Anne Summers

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